

## And in the Bronx, a Race

Red Smith

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# And in the Bronx, a Race

**F**OR five and a half innings the Yankees looked like something that had been in the water about four days. Indeed they had looked that way for a good while longer. They had tottered through the West doing nothing to distinguish themselves, yet when the Baltimore Orioles joined them in Yankee Stadium Friday they still led the American League East by five and a half games.

The Orioles, on a six-game winning streak, promptly made it seven straight. Then it was eight in a row and the gap between first and second place was three and a half games. If the Orioles could sweep the series in the third match yesterday, they would be only two and a half back, with five more confrontations, head to head, this week.

For the first time this summer, there was real promise of a race like those in the National League, not a comic cake-walk like that thing in the American League West.

For the last turn of the year in the Bronx, Tommy John, the Yankees' most reliable, was matched with Mike Flanagan, best pitcher in the league last year. For five innings it was a mismatch. The New York hitters looked dead and partially decomposed, getting four worthless singles against Flanagan, never more than one in an inning. Meanwhile Rick Dempsey led off a three-run third inning with a home run and in the fifth Eddie Murray and Gary Roenicke put their muscles together for a fourth run.

Based on recent performances, a lead of 4-0 seemed adequate, but in the sixth something brought out the beast in the Yankees, and in the 54,143 witnesses.

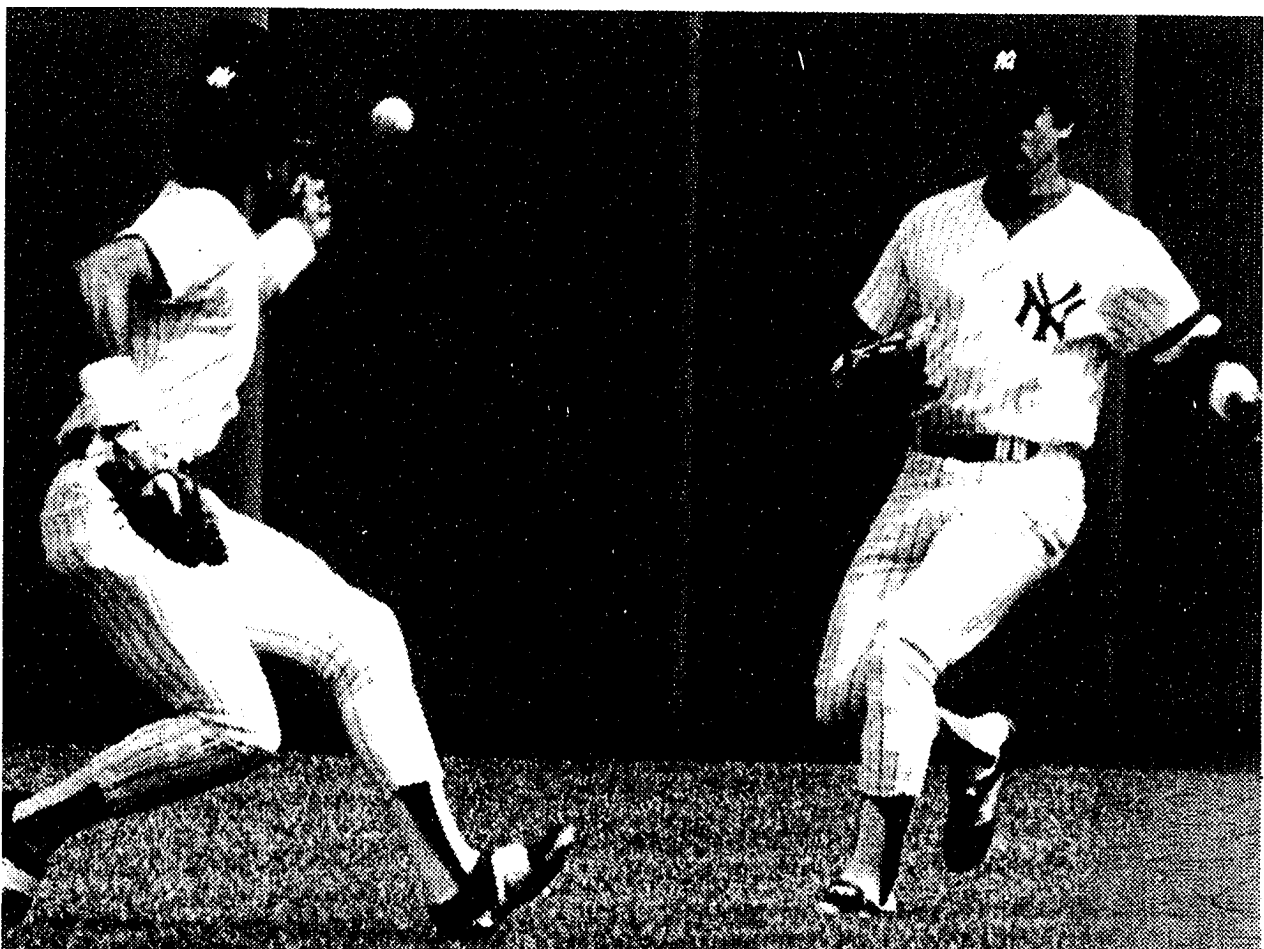
Where the Yankees had been treating Flanagan with utter deference, they began rolling him like a lush in an alley. Two singles, two doubles, two sacrifice flies and an error sent three runs in and left two runners on base with two outs. Up to the plate in this setting ambled Reggie Jackson, who was born for just such moments.

In early appearances he had walked, stared stonily at a called third strike, and flied out, but nothing of moment was happening on those occasions. This was theater — the admirable Flanagan in straits, facing the king of the hill.

The first two pitches were strikes. The next two were outside. Then, protecting the plate, Reggie fouled off three in a row. Another was outside, making the count three balls, two strikes. It was time to swing. Reggie did, lining a single into right for the tying run. The 400th home run of his career would have been more dramatic, but Jackson likes to save his climaxes for the perfect moment.

As it was, his hit drove Flanagan out of the game and brought in Sammy Stewart, a roundball player turned square. The Yankees milked him for a 5-4 lead in the seventh, creating the illusion that happy days might be here again, but that impression didn't survive the ninth inning. A fly by Lenn Sakata that Bobby Brown played into a triple, a single by Dempsey and double by Murray made the score 6-5.

This isn't quite mid-August and there are things to do before a championship is decided; let us be grateful for what we have.



The New York Times / Larry Morris

**A third-inning fly by Gary Roenicke dropping between Ruppert Jones, left, and Reggie Jackson for a run-scoring double**

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